

Hancock House
Hancocks Bridge, Salem County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Hancock House
Hancocks Bridge, Salem County, New Jersey

Owner: Commission on Historic Sites, State of
New Jersey

Custodian: Salem County Historical Society

Date of Erection: 1734

Architect:

Builder: William Hancock

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: Two and one-half

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - brick;
the west side glazed brick
and zigzag patterns

Interior walls - plastered

Roof - modern asbestos
shingles

Historical Data:

The initials of the builder and the date of construction are recorded on the gable on the west end. The initials W.H.S. stand for William and Sarah Hancock. The house remained in the

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possession of the Hancock family until about 1865.

William Hancock, the builder, was styled Majesty's Justice of the Peace for the county of Salem, in 1727; he was a member of the Colonial Legislature and was one of the committee that compiled the collection of Colonial Laws known as "Leaming and Spicers Grants and Concessions".

Upon his death in 1762, the house passed to his son William, who succeeded his father in the Legislature and as Majesty's Judge of the County Court for the holding of Pleas for the County of Salem.

The house was the scene of a massacre during the Revolution; this took place on the morning of March 21, 1773, and was incidental to the American defense of Alloways Creek. The Colonial militia was defending Salem and Cumberland Counties from the foraging of Colonel Charles Mawhood of the British Army. Sixteen were killed and eleven were taken prisoners in the assault in the house; some eight or ten who were dangerously wounded were counted as dead; however, some of these recovered. The blood stains are still visible on the floor where the militia men were bayoneted. Judge Hancock and the three of his aged friends were killed at the same time.

The type of the colonial architecture developed in the Fenwick Colony is noteworthy for the unique ornamentation in blue glazed brick.

The following description is taken from
"Colonial Roof-Trees" and "Candle Ends".

"The penthouse was carried across the front of the dwelling between the ground floor and the story above, and in the case of the Hancock House it was carried all the way along both the front and the back of the structure. In the craftsmanship of this house, we see the hand of the Quaker cabinet-maker, since all the trades were represented by these conscientious workmen. The Quaker built his doorway with simple and self-respecting trim, without side lights where the busybody might peer within; and with the most minute of entrance steps giving no encouragement to the loiterer. Glass (bull's-eye) afforded light over the front door. Coverings to their houses were mostly shingles made of cedar wood. In the work of restoration of the Hancock House, in order to diminish the risk of fire, it was necessary to replace the wood shingles with 'Salem' asbestos shingles which were designed to give the appearance of an old hand split wood shingle.

"Within the Hancock House we find two good size rooms on the ground floor; one known as the keeping room, with full-story chambers above and an attic over them. The framing is of white oak felled 'in ye old of ye moon,' mortised and tenoned and doweled with wooden pins. A native heart pine was used as a natural finish, as can be seen in the original paneled walls, mantels and wide floor boards. The rooms were lath and plastered and white wash was in vogue for nearly two centuries, as only one coat of paint had been applied to the interior and that by the late owner a few years ago. Each room has the original colonial fireplace, H and L hinges and a little slip of a window to light the closet

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on the side of the chimney. Two of these windows have been opened, having been closed during the Revolution to avoid the payment of tax exacted by the British. Original panes of crown glass are to be seen in the front sash on the first floor. The closed winding stairways connect the different floors."

In 1932, the Hancock House was purchased by a commission and the title passed to the State of New Jersey. The house is under the custody of the Salem County Historical Society, who have restored the building to its original condition; it is now used as a museum, depicting the history of the Fenwick Colony.

Bibliography:

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Walter C. Rutt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Reviewed Aug 26, 1936. TTW.

ADDENDUM TO
HANCOCK HOUSE
Locust Island Road and Main Street
Hancock's Bridge
Salem County
New Jersey

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